NeighbourWood Scheme

July 2017

Department of
Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

An Roinn
Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara

The Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is responsible for ensuring the development of forestry within Ireland in a manner and to a scale that maximises its contribution to national socio-economic well-being on a sustainable basis that is compatible with the protection of the environment. Its strategic objectives are:

1. To foster the efficient and sustainable development of forestry
2. To increase quality planting
3. To promote the planting of diverse tree species
4. To improve the level of farmer participation in forestry
5. To promote research and training in the sector
6. To encourage increased employment in the sector

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July 2017

Foreword

Under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020, Ireland has adopted a balanced approach to developing our nation's forests, by supporting the economic, social and environmental benefits of this important resource. As Minister of State with responsibility for forestry, I am delighted to announce the availability of the NeighbourWood Scheme – an innovative package aimed at developing amenity woodlands for local access and enjoyment, to deliver directly to local communities many of the important social benefits associated with our woodlands and forests.

The NeighbourWood Scheme brings communities and woodlands together, by helping local authorities and other landowners, both public and private, to create 'close-to-home' woodland amenities in partnership with communities, for local people to use and enjoy. These NeighbourWoods vary greatly in size and location, from forests in the countryside and on the outskirts of our villages, towns and cities, to woodlands located in more built-up areas. Often what sets these woodlands apart is the level of local enthusiasm and support for their development as an amenity – individual NeighbourWoods invariably become the focus for vibrant partnerships involving people from all walks of life intent on enhancing their local area and environment. These NeighbourWoods become part of the local identity and 'sense of place', and the benefits they create are enjoyed by local people over many years.

These benefits are numerous and far-reaching. NeighbourWoods provide accessible opportunities for recreation and regular exercise, and offer people 'time-out' and contact with the natural world and the changing seasons. They promote health, well-being and a better quality of life, and provide a place for family and friends to come together and relax. They create a venue for a wide range of community and sporting events, and represent the ideal 'outdoor classroom' for children to learn about nature and the environment. NeighbourWoods also deliver a wide range of environmental benefits, providing vital habitats for wildlife, removing atmospheric carbon, promoting air quality and improving the visual landscape, to mention just a few.

In all cases, what makes a woodland a NeighbourWood is how it is perceived by local people. NeighbourWoods are an invaluable community resource and part of the local fabric of life.

As with other aspects of Ireland's Forestry Programme, the NeigbourWood Scheme will deliver a vibrant legacy to be used and enjoyed by current and future generations. Each project under the scheme will encapsulate an innovative partnership involving local people working together to realise a local woodland amenity, and as Minister of State with responsibility for forestry, I am delighted to be associated with this vital effort.

Andrew Doyle, TD

Minister of State for Food, Forestry and Horticulture
at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

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Section 1
Introduction

What does the NeighbourWood Scheme support?

The NeighbourWood Scheme supports the development of attractive close-to-home woodland amenities (or 'neighbourwoods') for public use and enjoyment. The scheme is available to both public and private landowners, working in partnership with local communities. (Applications from other landowners may be considered on a case-by-case basis.)

Funding is available under three separate elements:

- NeighbourWood (NBR) ESTABLISHMENT funds the establishment of *new* neighbourwood on open 'greenfield' sites.
- NBR ENHANCEMENT funds the silvicultural enhancement of *existing* woodland already used as neighbourwood, or proposed for development as neighbourwood.
- NBR FACILITIES funds the installation and upgrade of appropriate recreational facilities within an area submitted under NBR ESTABLISHMENT or NBR ENHANCEMENT, or within an existing woodland suitable for recreation but not submitted under NBR ENHANCEMENT.

The NeighbourWood Scheme is operated by the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, and is funded by the Irish Government under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020. Various definitions relating to this scheme, together with its legal bases and the general rules that apply, are set out in Appendix A.

Funding opportunities available under the NeighbourWood Scheme

The NeighbourWood Scheme offers funding of up to 85% of eligible costs (exclusive of VAT) under three separate elements: NBR ESTABLISHMENT, NBR ENHANCEMENT and NBR FACILITIES. Applications are made by submitting a NeighbourWood Scheme Form 1 and accompanying plan and documentation.

The maximum available grant under each element – *payable as a single instalment* – is set out as follows:

- **NBR ESTABLISHMENT: €5,000 / ha (plus an additional fencing allowance, as under the Afforestation Scheme)**
- **NBR ENHANCEMENT: €5,000 / ha**
- **NBR FACILITIES: €3,800 / ha**

Individual applications can comprise a combination of NBR ESTABLISHMENT and NBR ENHANCEMENT subject to a limit of 12 ha in total, plus NBR FACILITIES subject to a limit of 12 ha. For example:

- an application involving 10 ha under NBR ESTABLISHMENT, 2 ha under NBR ENHANCEMENT, and 12 ha under NBR FACILITIES, would be deemed valid according to these limits;
- an application involving 0 ha under NBR ESTABLISHMENT, 12 ha under NBR ENHANCEMENT, and 12 ha under NBR FACILITIES, would be deemed valid according to these limits;

- an application involving 10 ha under NBR ESTABLISHMENT, 10 ha under NBR ENHANCEMENT, and 12 ha under NBR FACILITIES, would be deemed invalid according to these limits.

Once all works are completed, the Applicant submits a NeighbourWood Scheme Form 2, detailing the eligible costs (exclusive of VAT and supported by invoices) incurred under each element. The actual payable grant under each element is then calculated, based on 85% of the eligible costs (exclusive of VAT) detailed for that element in the Form 2, or the maximum grant available under that element, whichever is the lesser amount.

See Section 6 for further details.

About this document

This document sets out the procedures and standards for the Forest Service NeighbourWood Scheme, and is compiled specifically for those involved in developing projects under the scheme. Additional copies are available from the Forest Service, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford (Lo-Call 0761 064 415 / e-mail forestryappenq@agriculture.gov.ie / website www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice/grantsandpremiumschemes2015-2017/).

The NeighbourWood Scheme has undergone significant revision and improvement since its introduction in 2001, based on the experiences gained by the Forest Service in implementing the scheme, and feedback from public bodies, community groups and others involved in projects throughout the country.

The NeighbourWood Scheme will be kept under review, and the Forest Service welcomes any feedback and suggestions regarding ways in which it can be further developed and refined.

Section 2
Neighbourwoods

What are 'neighbourwoods'?

'Neighbourwoods' are accessible, close-to-home woodland amenities developed in partnership with local people and other interested groups, for public use and enjoyment.

Neighbourwoods can be used by people of all ages and abilities on a regular – often daily – basis, for strolling, family visits and picnics, walking-the-dog, 'power-walking', jogging, and a host of other outdoor activities. Also, local schools often use them as an 'outdoor classroom' for young people to learn about nature and the environment. Typical facilities include entrances, car parking, a variety of looped footpaths, information signage and waymarkers, nature trails, and seats and picnic tables.

A neighbourwood can be a stand-alone amenity, or can be linked into other amenities and attractions in the area, such as parkland, historical buildings, visitor attractions and wider walking or cycle routes.

Neighbourwoods vary greatly in locations, size and ownership. They can be located within or near villages, towns or cities, or may be more rural in nature. They can range in size, from pocket woodlands within built-up areas to large forests in the countryside. They may be owned by the local authority, Coillte or some other public body, or might even be privately-owned, where the owner is prepared to allow local people to access and enjoy the woodland.

On a wider scale, neighbourwoods can be used as a 'broad brush' tool for sustainable planning and development, particularly in urban and urban fringe areas. Woodlands can be used strategically to reinforce existing greenbelts, greenways and sustainable transport corridors, to provide buffers between residential and industrial areas, to protect urban watercourses, and to reclaim former landfill sites and industrial 'brownfield' sites. Woodland can also be created in the years leading up to development, providing a ready-made green landscape for the future.

In all cases, what makes a woodland a 'neighbourwood' is how it is perceived by local people. Neighbourwoods are an invaluable community resource and part of the local fabric of life and sense of place. They provide individuals, families and friends time-out and contact with the natural world, promote public health, well-being and a better quality of life, and create a resource for people young and old to learn about nature and the environment.

Woodland-based 'outdoor classrooms'

Close-to-home woodlands provide local schools with an ideal 'outdoor classroom' for young people. Visits to the woodland can be incorporated into a wide range of school subjects, including environmental studies, biology, art and craftwork, history, geography and language. The Tree Council of Ireland's Tree Day and Tree Week programmes demonstrate this role of woodlands in providing a vibrant educational resource.

The NeighbourWood Scheme can be used to develop the educational function of local woodlands (both existing and new) by, for example, funding nature trails, interpretive signage and school coach parking facilities. Where adequate land is available, individual schools can also apply for funding to develop woodland as an outdoor classroom within the school grounds.

Suitable and unsuitable projects

The NeighbourWood Scheme is aimed at projects involving the development of an attractive woodland setting for people to enter into and to enjoy. A woodland establishment and management approach is required, involving professional forestry input and using suitable site preparation techniques, planting stock, vegetation management, etc.

Suitable projects under the NeighbourWood Scheme have a clear potential for the development of an attractive amenity woodland that will be strategically located, easily accessible and well-used by local people. Relevant factors will include the suitability of location, the level of existing use, attractive natural features, local interest, linkage with wider walking routes and other amenities, etc.

Suitable projects adhere to good practice regarding amenity woodland design, establishment and management, as set out in *Forest Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers* (published by the Forest Service) and *Amenity Trees and Woodlands: A Guide to their Management in Ireland* (published by the Tree Council of Ireland, the Arboricultural Association – Irish Branch and the Society of Irish Foresters). See Section 8 for details.

Suitable projects place a particular focus on the provision of reasonable access-for-all, to enable people of different ages and abilities to use and enjoy the neighbourwood. Organisations such as Enable Ireland (www.enableireland.ie) and the UK's Fieldfare Trust (www.fieldfare.org.uk) provide relevant information and guidance.

Suitable projects also adopt and display a clear code of practice for visitors to follow, to protect the woodland. An excellent example is the 'Leave No Trace' national outdoor ethics code – see www.leavenotraceireland.org for details.

Other types of projects are not suitable under the NeighbourWood Scheme. These include

projects involving lines, avenues or shelterbelts of trees, street or roadside trees, small isolated pockets of planting on large open green spaces, projects involving poor quality sites, projects on sites subjected to an incompatible activity, and projects far removed from an obvious 'user group'. Projects dominated by intensive landscape-type planting involving standards, stakes and tree-guards are also unsuitable under the scheme (although this approach is acceptable around localised high-profile locations within an overall project, e.g. landscaping around an entrance and car-park).

Projects involving entrance fees (apart from fees for car-parking and other basic services), exclusive membership, or some other barrier to general public use, are not eligible under the scheme.

The NeighbourWood Scheme funds operations directly associated with the development of new and existing woodland for public amenity, and the associated recreational infrastructure. Ongoing expenses such as litter collection, the provision of security services, public liability insurance and unspecified contingency funds, are not covered under the scheme.

Section 3
Application Process

Applying under the NeighbourWood Scheme

Completed applications under the NeighbourWood Scheme will be assessed by the Forest Service, on receipt. Applications will be evaluated according to a 3-step process set out below. This involves scoring based on set criteria that best capture the aims and objectives of the NeighbourWood Scheme. Applicants must be fully aware of the requirements (including site requirements) of the NeighbourWood Scheme, to avoid developing unsuitable applications.

In all cases, the cost of compiling an unsuccessful application will not be recoverable.

NeighbourWood applications must be made on a hardcopy NeighbourWood Scheme **Form 1**. This form includes Applicant, site location and ownership details, and environmental information required for consultation purposes. The Applicant and a Registered Forester must complete the application form following a site visit and detailed field assessment by the Registered Forester. (For the current list of Registered Foresters, see www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice/forestservicegeneralinformation/) For the application to be considered complete, the following additional documentation is also required:

- **Certified Species Map**, signed by the Registered Forester. This map is used for area and grant calculation. An original OSi 1:5,000 map is required, and the standard mapping conventions set out in the Forest Service *Forestry Standards Manual* apply. The areas relating to the different elements being applied for must be accurately mapped and labelled as follows:
  - NBR Establishment
  - NBR Enhancement
  - NBR Facilities

  Note that NBR Establishment and NBR Enhancement must not overlap the same area. NBR Facilities can include areas under NBR Establishment and NBR Enhancement, or suitable woodland not submitted under NBR Enhancement.
- **NeighbourWood Plan**, which details various aspects of the project and how it meets key criteria, and also the specific works proposed under each element being applied for. The plan must adhere to the template provided in Appendix B of this document. As well as addressing key aspects required in order to facilitate the Forest Service in its evaluation of the application, the NeighbourWood Plan will also serve as a basis for project partners to set out how the project will evolve over time. The NeighbourWood Plan must be signed by the Applicant and the Registered Forester. See Appendix B for guidance on preparing the document.
- **Site location map**, based on a Discovery Series 1:50,000 map and showing the main access approach onto the site. The standard mapping conventions set out in the Forest Service *Forestry Standards Manual* apply.
- Documentation clearly demonstrating partnerships on which the proposal is based. Such partnerships will typically involve the landowner (public or private), local community

groups and specific recreational user groups. Such documentation can include a Memo of Understanding between the public landowner (local authority, Coillte, etc.) and community groups, or other formal correspondences.

- For both public and private sites, a signed declaration from the Applicant that the amenity will be open to the general public throughout the year free-of-charge (apart from fees for car parking and other basic services), and that the amenity will be maintained and access provided for the 6 year contract period. This period commences on the completion of all works. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in all monies paid under the scheme being recovered by the Forest Service.

Applications will be subject to a 3-step process, as detailed below.

Step 1: Document check

The first step involves a document check, to ensure that the application is valid and complete.

Step 2: Detailed assessment

Once Step 1 is completed, individual applications undergo a detailed assessment to examine silvicultural and environmental suitability, and the appropriateness of proposals presented for each element being applied for. Standard Forest Service procedures and protocols regarding referral to various bodies, screening for Appropriate Assessment, screening to determine EIA requirements, etc. apply – see the *Forestry Standards Manual* for details.

Step 3: Scoring of criteria

The assessment of applications will also include reference to certain criteria that best capture the aims and objectives of the NeighbourWood Scheme. As set out on the following page, seven criteria apply, each with an equal weighting of 10 points. (Applicants are advised to clearly demonstrate in their NeighbourWood Plan how the various criteria are met, providing additional documentation, if necessary. Otherwise, associated points cannot be awarded.)

Only those applications that achieve a minimum of 45 points out of a maximum score of 70 will be eligible for consideration for approval.

Note, Step 2 may deem individual applications as being unsuitable (based on, e.g. environmental or silvicultural grounds), even if the scoring received from Step 3 is above 45 points.

NeighbourWood Scheme Criteria	Maximum score
Criterion 1: The extent to which the site is already used – or has the potential to be used – by the local community on a 'free-to-enter' basis, for non-specialised outdoor / woodland recreation (e.g. walking, jogging, family picnics). Indicators include the level of existing use, the active presence of a local community group seeking recreational development, the proximity to an population centre, existing attributes of the site lending itself to recreational development (e.g. attractive mixed woodland, features, views), the level of immediate (onsite or immediately adjacent) access to other wider walking routes or cycle ways, and / or with an existing attraction onsite which itself draws significant visitor numbers.	10
Criterion 2: Extent and level of partnership underpinning the application, relating to the local authority (or other public body), the local community, specific user groups (including people with particular needs), particular interest groups (e.g. local historical societies, birdwatchers), local schools, local businesses, local development enterprises, etc.	10
Criterion 3: The level of focus on the provision of a high quality and varied experience for users of all ages and abilities, through the installation of appropriate facilities. Indicators include the appropriate layout and design of facilities, including pathways, signage, information boards, the level of balance reached between the carrying capacity of the woodland and the layout and density of pathways, the layout of pathways to provide looped walks and to lead visitors to key woodland features.	10
Criterion 4: The level of focus on the provision of environmental education and outdoor interpretation of the woodland habitat, and habitats in general, and also the wider heritage associated with Ireland's woodlands and forests - natural, historical and cultural. Indicators will include the nature of facilities being proposed (e.g. nature trail, specialised signage), existing or proposed linkage with local schools, the diversity of the woodland and its suitability for this use, a parallel application under the Forest Service Native Woodland Scheme.	10
Criterion 5: The level of focus on identifying potential issues regarding (e.g.) security, dumping, vandalism, fire, and on formulating proposed integrated and sustainable solutions to tackle these.	10
Criterion 6: The level of integration into the local infrastructure. Indicators include inclusion with local development plans and tourist leaflets, road signage, good quality approach roads and / or footpaths, integration into local transport.	10
Criterion 7: The long-term future sustainability of the project, for example, integration into local authority (or other public body) budgets, evidence of linkage into long-term plans (County Council Development Plan, Biodiversity Plan, 'Green' Plan, Tourism Plan, Recreational Strategy).	10
TOTAL SCORE	**70**

Approval

Approvals will issue subject to funding availability and following the normal checks and balances that are part of this document, the document setting out the Afforestation and Creation of Woodland Scheme, and the *Forestry Standards Manual*.

Approval (often with conditions attached) is issued by the Forest Service in the form of a Letter of Approval.

Work can only commence after receipt of this Letter of Approval. Successful Applicants are required to confirm within 14 days of receipt of the Letter of Approval, whether or not they wish to utilise the approval. If the response is 'No' (or no response is received within 14 days), the approval is cancelled.

The above 3-stage process is generally completed within 1-2 months. However, longer periods of time may be required, e.g. if the Forest Service refers an application to another body. At all stages, Applicants can enquire about the progress of their application, by contacting the Forest Service.

The Department reserves the right to amend the details of the process outlined above.

Section 4
Scheme Elements

What is funded under the NeighbourWood Scheme?

Funding is available under three separate elements:

- NBR ESTABLISHMENT funds the establishment of new neighbourwood on open 'greenfield' sites
- NBR ENHANCEMENT funds the silvicultural enhancement of existing woodland already used as neighbourwood, or proposed for development as neighbourwood
- NBR FACILITIES funds the installation and upgrade of appropriate recreational facilities within an area submitted under NBR ESTABLISHMENT or NBR ENHANCEMENT, or within an existing woodland suitable for recreation but not submitted under NBR ENHANCEMENT.

Each of these elements is described in the following pages. Individual applications can comprise NBR ESTABLISHMENT and / or NBR ENHANCEMENT for up to 12 ha in total, and NBR FACILITIES for up to 12 ha.

Subject to criteria, any combination of the above three elements can be applied for in the same NeighbourWood Scheme application. However, the area relating to each element must be clearly shown on the Certified Species Map accompanying the Form 1.

Note that areas applied for under NBR ESTABLISHMENT and NBR ENHANCEMENT must not physically overlap.

Possible interaction with the Forest Service Native Woodland Scheme is outlined in Section 5.

NeighbourWood Establishment

NBR Establishment funds the establishment of new neighbourwood on open 'greenfield' sites.

Eligible operations

Eligible operations under NBR Establishment are as follows:

- Preparation of the NeighbourWood Plan
- Purchase of suitable forest transplant stock
- Ground preparation
- Fertiliser application
- Fencing and other protective measures
- Clearance of invasive exotic species and other woody growth, where ecologically appropriate
- Planting
- Maintenance (including vegetation management)
- Other appropriate operations, where pre-approved by the Forest Service (e.g. ecological survey, natural regeneration works)

NBR Establishment must include Areas of Biodiversity Enhancement (ABEs), comprising retained habitats and open spaces identified primarily for biodiversity purposes. ABEs must be plantable and an integral part of the area submitted for planting – see the Forest Service *Forest Biodiversity Guidelines* and the *Forestry Standards Manual* for details.

Specific to the NeighbourWood Scheme, ABEs can include up to 30% of the area submitted under NBR Establishment, comprising 5-10% (of the area submitted) earmarked for retained habitats, and the remainder for open spaces. As well as creating habitat diversity within the new woodland, these open spaces should be designed as part of the woodland amenity, as corridors for walking trails, glades for picnic areas, clearances for viewpoints, etc. (Please note, these open spaces cannot include areas that are not plantable, such as a car park.)

While compatible overlap exists between biodiversity and amenity, certain vulnerable habitats onsite should be kept separate, in order to protect against 'people pressure'.

Neighbourwood Enhancement

NBR Enhancement funds the silvicultural enhancement of existing woodland already used as neighbourwood, or proposed for development as neighbourwood, to improve the woodland's sustainability, suitability and attractiveness for recreation.

Eligible operations

Eligible operations under NBR Enhancement are as follows:

- Preparation of the NeighbourWood Plan
- Purchase of suitable forest transplant stock
- Ground preparation
- Fencing and other protective measures
- Clearance of invasive species such as laurel and rhododendron
- Tree felling, where appropriate(*)
- Understorey and coupe planting
- Maintenance (including vegetation management)
- Woodland edge management
- Maintenance of open spaces
- Respacing
- Other appropriate operations, where pre-approved by the Forest Service (e.g. ecological survey, natural regeneration works)

(* Where a marketable quantity of timber is realised from thinning / felling undertaken as part of an approved NeighbourWood Plan, the quantity (in cubic metres) of timber must be documented and details submitted to the Forest Service, together with evidence of timber-related income (including invoices and receipts). Similarly, where a marketable quantity of timber is realised for the owner's use, or used by a third party but not sold, the quantity of timber must be documented and details submitted, together with an estimate of its indicative value. The Forest Service may reduce the grant payable accordingly, reflecting the value of the timber realised and (where relevant) the normal costs associated with standard replanting.)

NeighbourWood Facilities

NBR Facilities funds the installation and upgrade of appropriate recreational facilities within an area submitted under NBR Establishment or NBR Enhancement, or within an existing woodland suitable for recreation but not submitted under NBR Enhancement.

Eligible facilities

NBR Facilities is aimed at funding general facilities that enable access to, and enjoyment of, the woodland by the general community. Such facilities include footpaths, signage, waymarkers, car-parking, seating and picnic tables.

Other types of facilities deemed by the Forest Service to be specialised in nature (such as fitness training equipment and playground equipment) will not be eligible for funding under the NeighbourWood Scheme, and Applicants are encouraged to seek alternative sources of funding for these features.

All facilities must satisfy the following criteria:

- All facilities (including footpaths) must be laid out in a logical sequence, with a focus on facilitating access for all.
- Facilities must be sensitively designed and appropriate to the woodland setting.
- Facilities must be high quality, durable and resistant to damage.
- Primary footpaths should be looped in nature and should have a durable walking surface (hardcore and top-dressed) of at least 1.5 metres in width.
- Facilities must be appropriately integrated throughout the entire site.
- Overall, favour quality over quantity. Focus on positioning a carefully selected number of high quality facilities at key points within the woodland.
- In all cases, specifications and positioning must be detailed in the NeighbourWood Plan. Applicants are encouraged to adhere to established standards and specifications regarding outdoor recreational facilities, while also reflecting the wooded setting.

See the Forest Service's *Forest Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers* for information on facilities for woodland recreation. Projects involving recreational trail development should adhere to the trail standards recommended by the National Trails Office (www.irishtrails.ie/national_trails_office). When preparing the NeighbourWood Scheme application, a preliminary trail development

survey should be completed to assist project development groups in quantifying all necessary and appropriate works.

Attractive close-to-home woodland amenities provide an ideal setting for people to participate in 'green exercise', i.e. regular physical exercise in a safe and relaxing natural outdoor environment. Physical exercise can simply mean stepping out regularly for a relaxing stroll, or it can entail power-walking, jogging and other forms of structured activities. At whatever level, green exercise promotes our physical health and sense of well-being, and is part of the national effort to combat obesity and heart disease and to promote public health.

Facilities eligible under NeighbourWood FACILITIES can include specifically designed 'calorie-count' walks and fitness trails, in order to promote green exercise.

Section 5
Interaction with other Schemes and Initiatives

Native Woodland Scheme

The Native Woodland Scheme (NWS) is a separate grant scheme supporting the protection and expansion of native woodlands in Ireland. The scheme has been developed under an ongoing partnership with the National Parks & Wildlife Service, the Heritage Council, Woodlands of Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland, and others. Two separate elements apply: NWS ESTABLISHMENT, which supports the creation of new native woodland; and NWS CONSERVATION, which supports the restorative management of existing native woodlands. NWS projects must adhere to various ecological criteria reflecting the objectives of the scheme.

The NWS may be of interest to Applicants considering the NeigbourWood Scheme. Potentially, projects can be developed involving the planting and / or restorative management of native woodland under the former, and the development of facilities for appropriate access, amenity and interpretation, under the latter. Applicants wishing to follow this route can apply separately under both schemes, selecting the appropriate elements under each. Parallel applications under both schemes are treated separately by the Forest Service, with appropriate cross-referencing. If applying under the NWS, all of the terms and conditions, and grant and premium levels, of that scheme apply.

For further information on the Native Woodland Scheme, see www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice/grantsandpremiumschemes2015-2017/ or contact a NWS Forester, as included on the list of Registered Foresters, available at www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice/forestservicegeneralinformation/

Woodlands of Ireland, which operates in a partnership format involving those with an interest in protecting, enhancing and expanding Ireland's native woodland resource, is also available for general information and guidance on the Native Woodland Scheme (see www.woodlandsofireland.com).

Community-based water projects

Many landowners and communities around Ireland are developing projects aimed at protecting and enhancing streams, rivers and lakes as part of the local environment and heritage, often with the support of the nationwide Local Authority Waters & Communities Office(*). Many of these projects involve the development of local amenities to allow people to experience and to enjoy the beauty of our waterways and the amazing wildlife they support. The NeighbourWood Scheme can be used to provide funding for these amenities, where woodland is involved. For example, an existing riverside walk could be enhanced by establishing sections of new woodland along its length, to enrich the experience for walkers. Similarly, an existing woodland along a waterway could be 'upgraded' with the addition of pathways, information signs and a wildlife hide.

Well-sited and managed woodlands also contribute in many ways to the protection and enhancement of water and aquatic life, and the NeighbourWood Scheme (and the Native Woodland Scheme) provide opportunities for realising these benefits in a way that also enhances people's experience, enjoyment and appreciation of Ireland's inland waters.

(* The Waters and Communities Office was set up in February 2016 under the Water Framework Directive to promote better management of our streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwater for the benefit of current and future generations. A key objective is to engage local communities and promote public participation in the management of our water environment. For further information and to contact the local Community water Officer working in your area, see www.watersandcommunities.ie/)

Section 6

Grant Payment

How is the grant paid under the NeighbourWood Scheme?

Application for payment of the NeighbourWood Scheme grant is made using the NeighbourWood Scheme Form 2, accompanied by the following:

- a Certified Species Map indicating *inter alia* the areas under each element for which grant draw-down is being applied for,
- a separate statement of costs incurred under each element, corresponding with those identified at the Form 1 stage,
- invoices for all costs incurred,
- Tax Clearance Certificates, where appropriate, for the Applicant and for contractors involved in the works,
- Supplier's Document / Provenance Declaration Form for all planting material used,
- proof of ownership, and
- mandates, where applicable.

All NeighbourWood Scheme elements must be submitted together on the same Form 2.

The Applicant and his / her Registered Forester must complete the Form 2 following a site visit and a detailed field assessment by the Registered Forester. The Form 2 itself sets out the requirements to be met to make a valid application.

All approved works across all relevant elements of the scheme must be completed before the completion date specified in the Letter of Approval. The Form 2 and supporting documentation must be submitted to the Department as soon as possible after the approved works have been completed, but no later than 6 weeks after the completion date. In situations where the Applicant requires an extension beyond the specified completion date or the 6 week period for Form 2 submission, s/he can submit a request for same to the Forest Service (using the e-mail address forestryappenq@agriculture.gov.ie). Requests for extensions must be made prior to the completion date of approved works or, in the case of the Form 2 deadline, during the 6 week period.

(If the application for payment is not submitted before the above deadline (or before the end of any agreed extension), the application may be deemed ineligible for support.)

At this stage, the payable grant is calculated. The actual payable grant under each element is calculated, based on 85% of the eligible costs (as supported by invoices and exclusive of VAT) detailed for that element in the Form 2, or the maximum grant available under that element, whichever is the lesser amount. The payable grant calculated for each element is then totalled, giving the total payable grant.

Before payment, the Forest Service may undertake an inspection of the site to confirm that all works have been completed to the required standard.

Payments shall be made in respect of Applicants who make valid applications prepared by a Registered Forester and who have developed their NeighbourWood Scheme site in accordance with the Form 1 approval and in compliance with:

- all relevant EU requirements and national legislation for the time being in force,
- the terms and conditions of the NeighbourWood Scheme, as set out in this document (and any revisions thereof), any circulars amending the scheme requirements, the application forms, Letters of Approval, and (where appropriate) remedial works notifications,
- *Forestry Standards Manual*,
- *Code of Best Forest Practice – Ireland*,
- *Irish National Forest Standard*, and
- Forest Service Environmental Guidelines, including the *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation* (where NBR ESTABLISHMENT is involved).
- Note, any proposed tree felling may require a Felling Licence under the Forestry Act 2014 and Forestry Regulations 2017 (S.I.191 of 2017). For details, see www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice/treefelling/ and the FS-DAFM *Felling & Reforestation Policy* document.

Ongoing inspections

All sites may be subjected to periodic inspection by the Forest Service, to ensure continued compliance with the NeighbourWood Plan and scheme criteria. Failure to comply may result in the recouping of grant aid.

Tackling larger projects

Please note, individual applications under the NeighbourWood Scheme can be no larger than 12 ha in area. This can comprise NWS ESTABLISHMENT and / or NBR ENHANCEMENT for up to 12 ha in total, and NBR FACILITIES (for up to 12 ha).

Larger sites can be funded under the scheme by submitting separate applications for separate areas over consecutive years, at a rate of one application per year.

Note, previous approval for one application in relation to an overall project, does not guarantee subsequent approval for any follow-up application for that same overall project. Each application made must be stand-alone in its own right (in terms of delivering a viable woodland amenity), and not dependent on subsequent applications being approved.

Treated area under NBR Enhancement

Under NBR Enhancement, the cost of any eligible operation is based on the treated area and the maximum grant rate per hectare. For example, if the treated area is 1 ha, the grant rate cannot exceed €5,000/ha for any operation or cumulative operations for that treated hectare. It is not possible to transfer grant aid from one part of the forest where the maximum eligible costs were not exceeded, to another part where the maximum eligible costs were exceeded. Eligible costs for eligible operations will be assessed for each area treated.

Section 7
Silvicultural Requirements

Site requirements

The following site requirements apply under the NeighbourWood Scheme.

- The site must be capable of supporting the vigorous and sustainable establishment and development of the proposed woodland. High elevation sites, severely exposed sites and infertile sites are excluded, as are sites prone to flooding, sites with rock outcrops over 25% of the area, and sites with a shell marl within 50 cm of the soil surface.
- Challenging urban sites such as former landfills, 'brownfield' sites and other altered sites may have potential under the NeighbourWood Scheme. However, any such site must be fully evaluated by an appropriate expert regarding its suitability for woodland development, and any subsequent application must be supported by a technical report. Issues include substrate quality and fertility, topsoil depth, capping treatment and possible contaminants. Relevant sources of information include the UK Forestry Commission's *Tree Establishment on Landfill Sites* (1997) .
- The minimum site area under each element is 0.1 ha. The minimum average width ('tree-to-tree', excluding open spaces, buffer zones, etc.) is 20 metres.
- Other site requirements apply, as per the Forest Service *Forestry Standards Manual* and the Land Types for Afforestation procedure (whereby any site presented under NBR Establishment must satisfy the criteria for Land Type 'Suitable Land: GPC2-12', including the requirement for a R+N Sore of 6.0 and above).
- See Section 2 for project types unsuitable under the NeighbourWood Scheme.

Species requirements

The species listed in the following table are acceptable for planting under NBR Establishment and NBR Enhancement of the NeighbourWood Scheme. Other species may also be acceptable to the Forest Service, but must be approved in advance.

Under EU legislation, all forest reproductive material must be covered by a Supplier's Document in the format of a Provenance Declaration Form. In addition, a number of species require an EU Plant Passport under Plant Health Regulations. Refer to the *Forestry Standards Manual* for details, specifications and procedures regarding acceptable seed origins / provenances and plant health requirements. To promote the wildlife value of the neighbourwood, Applicants are strongly encouraged to favour native trees (indicated by ' * ' in the table opposite) derived from seed collected from within the island of Ireland.

Species selection must reflect the overall site conditions, and localised conditions within the site, e.g. 'pioneer' species such as rowan and silver birch on difficult sites, alder in damper areas, oak and beech on drier, more fertile sites, etc.

All planting under NBR Establishment and NBR Enhancement must be carried out using forest

Broadleaves	Conifers
Common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) *	Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*)
Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)	Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
Downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) *	Grand fir (*Abies grandis*)
Silver birch (*Betula pendula*) *	Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*)
Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*) *	European larch (*Larix decidua*)
Spanish chestnut (*Castanea sativa*)	Hybrid larch (*Larix* x *eurolepis*)
Lime (*Tilia cordata*)	Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra* var. *nigra*)
Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*)	Corsican pine (*Pinus nigra* var. *maritima*)
Pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) *	Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*)
Sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*) *	Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*)
Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) *	Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) *
Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)	Coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*)
Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) *	Norway spruce (*Picea abies*)
Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) *	Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*)

transplant stock planted at 2.0 metre x 2.0 metre spacing, giving 2,500 trees / ha. Planting mixtures must comprise species with compatible growth rates.

Site preparation

Species selection should reflect the natural conditions of the site, to minimise the need for altering site conditions. For public safety, ground preparation methods should be limited to ripping and scrap mounding, and drainage generally avoided.

Vegetation management

Young trees

The control of grass, herbaceous plants, brambles, bracken, etc. is essential for the rapid establishment and growth of young trees planted under both NBR Establishment and NBR Enhancement. Poor vegetation management results in mortality, the loss of growth and vigour, and the need for greater input later on (e.g. the filling-in of gaps).

Non-herbicide control (trampling, mulches, mats) is generally only realistic on smaller sites and in highly sensitive areas (e.g. aquatic buffer zones). Otherwise, herbicide application represents the most effective and economical method of vegetation management.

Where used, herbicide application must be kept to the minimum required to ensure success, and should be used in combination with other methods, e.g. scrap mounding (to provide a vegetation-free planting position) and the use of larger transplant stock. Herbicide application should be carried out using a knapsack sprayer, with the aim of maintaining a 1 metre wide area around the base of each tree free of competing vegetation, until the tree has become free-growing.

Mechanical cutting, mowing and the use of strimmers are not appropriate, as these methods can invigorate competition and result in physical damage to the young trees.

If planting under NBR Enhancement (e.g. planting within small coupes or beneath larger gaps in the overhead canopy), the use of tree shelters can prove beneficial, by encouraging rapid

establishment and grow, by protecting against grazing, and also by highlighting the location of individual trees for the follow-up control of competing vegetation, particularly brambles.

Invasive species

A number of invasive species can represent a serious threat to the amenity value and development of woodland. These including rhododendron (right), cherry laurel, red osier dogwood, Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and snowberry. Such species must be effectively controlled and removed, through the application of best practice appropriate for each species (cutting and stump treatment, stem injection, foliar spray, mechanical flaying or uprooting, etc.) and to the specific site conditions involved. A long-term strategic approach is invariably required, based on initial treatment, follow-up treatment, control (where possible) on adjoining sites, and ongoing monitoring.

Rhododendron represents a significant threat, and treatment includes stump treatment and the spraying of regrowth, stem injection, and mechanical uprooting and removal. The Woodlands of Ireland Information Note 3, entitled *The Control of Rhododendron in Native Woodlands* and available at www.woodlandsofireland.com, sets out best practice.

In all cases, any cut woody material should be piled neatly onsite or removed, to allow clear access for tree planting and the treatment of unwanted regrowth of the invasive species.

For health, safety and environmental reasons, all herbicide application must adhere to the *Guidelines for the Use of Herbicides in Forestry*, *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation*, *Forestry & Water Quality Guidelines* and *Forest Protection Guidelines*.

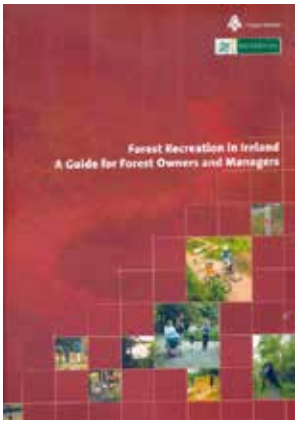
Protection

Where necessary, sites must be protected from deer, goats, livestock, rabbits and hares, to prevent damage to newly-planted trees. All protective measures must adhere to the standards and specifications set out in the *Forestry Standards Manual* and the *Forest Protection Guidelines*.

Tree guards can be used, where appropriate, e.g. small sites, low-density planting within water setbacks, understorey or coupe planting. In heavily used areas, it may be appropriate to use simple post-and-rail fencing, to remind people of the presence of young vulnerable trees.

Section 8
Further Information

The following publications provide practical information and guidance on amenity woodland and public participation.



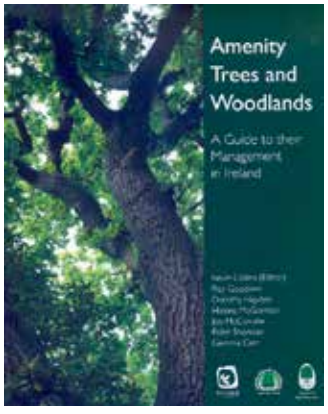
Forest Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers

Information on general forest recreation, including consultation and planning, advice on facilities such as footpaths, signage and open spaces, and recreational issues such as promotion, woodland education, safety and security, and dealing with vandalism and other undesirable activities. Also contains a listing of relevant publications and organisations. www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice

Interacting with Greenspace: Public Participating with Professionals in the Planning and Management of Parks and Woodlands

A practical manual setting out ways to involve local people in the ongoing planning and management of neighbourwoods.

www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice



Amenity Trees and Woodlands: A Guide to their Management in Ireland

Information on the establishment and management of amenity woodlands, including species selection, planting and aftercare, thinning, the control of invasive species, and woodland rejuvenation. Contact the Tree Council of Ireland (trees@treecouncil.ie) for further information.

Appendix A
Definitions, Legal Basis and Rules

Overview

This appendix sets out various definitions relating to the NeighbourWood Scheme, together with its legal bases and the general rules that apply.

Definitions

- 'Minister' means the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- 'Department' means the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine.
- 'Registered Forester' means a qualified person listed on the Register of Foresters and Forestry Companies, available from the Department.
- 'Forestry Environmental Guidelines' means the following publications as amended from time-to-time: *Forestry and Water Quality Guidelines*; *Forestry & Landscape Guidelines*; *Forestry & Archaeology Guidelines*; *Forest Biodiversity Guidelines*; *Forest Harvesting & the Environment Guidelines*; *Forestry Protection Guidelines*; *Forestry & Otter Guidelines*, *Forestry & Kerry Slug Guidelines*, *Forestry & Freshwater Pearl Mussel Requirements* and the *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation*. The Minister may, from time-to-time, amend the guidelines or add further guidelines to this definition.

Legal basis

The legal basis of the NeighbourWood Scheme is the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 and the European Commission's State Aid approval of that programme issued to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on the 5th February 2015 (ref. no. SG-Greffe (2015) D/1056/7).

General rules

- Applications under the NeighbourWood Scheme shall be subjected to a prior environmental assessment and consultation process by the Department to ensure that proposed projects are compatible with the protection and enhancement of the environment and that they are unlikely to have a negative impact on, *inter alia*, water quality, biodiversity, archaeology and the landscape. Further information about the Forest Service environmental assessment (including screening for appropriate assessment and screening to determine EIA requirements) and consultation process is provided in the relevant sections of the *Forestry Standards Manual*.
- All projects approved under the NeighbourWood Scheme shall be carried out in compliance with:
  - the specific scheme requirements set out in this document,

- the *Code of Best Forest Practice – Ireland*,
- the *Irish National Forest Standard*,
- the Forest Service suite of environmental guidelines relating to water, biodiversity, archaeology, landscape, harvesting and protection (including protection against fire), species guidelines relating to the Kerry slug and otter, the *Forestry & Freshwater Pearl Mussel Requirements* and the *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation*,
- the *Forestry Standards Manual*, and
- any additional conditions attached to the Letter of Approval, as laid down by the Minister.

- Support under the NeighbourWood Scheme must be acknowledged on all information boards, leaflets, booklets, posters, websites, press releases, press articles, etc. relating to the project, using the following wording:

  "This project is supported by the NeighbourWood Scheme, funded by the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, under the Forestry Programme, 2014-2020."

  This wording must also be accompanied by the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine logo (electronic version available from the Forest Service).

  The above wording and Department logo must be prominent and legible, and of the same scale as that used for other listed funding sources and project partners.

- Support under the NeighbourWood Scheme must also be highlighted during all related interviews for the printed and electronic media, radio and TV.

- A Registered Forester is required to prepare the NeighbourWood Scheme application and to oversee subsequent work. This individual will have experience of working with Forest Service grant schemes and will be aware of the relevant procedures, standards and environmental guidelines. S/he will also be familiar with woodland establishment and management operations, and will be able to identify suitable woodland contractors to undertake the work. Typically, the forester works alongside other professionals within the local authority (or other public body), such as landscape architects, horticulturists, planners, engineers and heritage officers. For the current list of Registered Foresters, see www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice/forestservicegeneralinformation/

- The Minister must be informed if there is a change of ownership of a woodland which has received grant assistance under the scheme. In the event of a change of ownership, or other disposal, the Minister reserves the right to redeem the grant or to seek adequate written assurance from the purchaser or other appropriate party regarding the future maintenance of the amenity and its facilities, and its future availability for public use. In the event of failing to obtain such assurance, the Minister reserves the right to redeem from the grantee the full amount of the grant paid in respect of the project.

- The owner is responsible for all issues surrounding safety and public liability in relation to projects receiving funding under the NeighbourWood Scheme. Applicants should ensure that their woodland has adequate public liability insurance. No liability shall be attached to the Minister for any injury, loss or damage to any person or property in respect of the woodland.

- Projects will be ineligible for funding under an element of the NeighbourWood Scheme, where work of a similar nature was previously undertaken on site with Forest Service grant aid, within the previous 15 years.
- As part of its evaluation of the application, the Forest Service may request the Applicant to supply letters of support for the project from third parties, such as local authorities, local enterprise or tourism bodies, and national sporting bodies.
- The Forest Service may seek to ensure a regional spread of available funding under the NeighbourWood Scheme.
- The contract period under the NeighbourWood Scheme is 6 years, commencing on the completion date of works. Applicants have a responsibility to ensure that any new and existing woodland, and facilities, funded under the scheme are maintained throughout the contract period. Otherwise, the Forest Service will seek to recover grant aid paid, and interest charged at the appropriate rate.
- Privately-owned sites funded under the NeighbourWood Scheme must be open to the public for at least 6 years from the completion date of works, otherwise any grant payments made will be recovered.
- All works under the NeighbourWood Scheme are subject to the provisions of the Forestry Act 2014 and the Forestry Regulations (S.I.191 of 2017), which controls, *inter alia*, afforestation and tree felling. Where required, any application for a Felling Licence should be made prior to or in tandem with the NeighbourWood Scheme application.
- The new Sustainable Use Directive will also be an important feature of the Neighbourwood Scheme, ensuring proper use of pesticides.
- Only projects that receive prior written approval from the Department, and which are undertaken in compliance with the terms and conditions of approval, will be eligible for support. Support will take the form of grants.
- Apart from exceptions identified in this document (e.g. 30% ABE allowance, 2,500 trees / ha stocking rate), NBR ESTABLISHMENT must comply with the requirements, terms and conditions of the Afforestation Scheme. In this regard, Applicants should also refer to that scheme's document, which can be found at www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice/grantsandpremiumschemes2015-2017/
- Individuals applying for participation in the NeighbourWood Scheme must be over 18 years of age and hold a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN). Companies must provide their company registration details (CRO number). In order to qualify for payment, the Applicant must own, lease or be in joint management of the land. Applicants must provide documentary evidence of ownership and of leasing or joint management where relevant, as detailed in the *Forestry Standards Manual*. The Department will refuse applications for grant aid where it is found that an application was made by a person other than a person meeting the above criteria.
- All works must be completed by the completion date set out in the Letter of Approval, and the Form 2 submitted to the Department within 6 weeks of that date, unless there is an agreed extension period.
- The NeighbourWood Scheme shall operate for a period to be determined by the Minister.
- Participation in the NeighbourWood Scheme is voluntary.
- The grant will not be paid until ownership has been established and full proof of

ownership has been provided at Form 2 stage.

- All payments will be made directly to the Applicant, unless otherwise mandated.
- The Minister reserves the right to carry out inspections on any land submitted for pre-approval or on any land for which a grant has been claimed or paid under this Scheme during the 6 year contract period (the latter, to ensure continued compliance with the NeighbourWood Plan and scheme criteria). Applicants are obliged to ensure that, where required, adequate access to the land and forests is provided to allow inspections by the Department.
- It is a condition of this scheme that all grant aided activities shall be conducted in compliance with the laws of the State relating, *inter alia*, to tax and employment. Proof of compliance shall be required, such as the provision of Tax Clearance Certificates at Form 2 stage, where appropriate.
- A review system applies to the NeighbourWood Scheme. Requests for reviews of decisions should be made in writing, giving detailed grounds for the review, to the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford.
- All forms are available on the Departments website at www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice/
- All payments will be made *via* Electric Fund Transfer (EFT) directly to the Applicant's bank account.
- Applicants and their Agents shall comply with all requirements under VAT legislation. All payments under the NeighbourWood Scheme will be made exclusive of VAT, regardless of the Applicant's VAT status.
- Penalties may apply at the discretion of the Minister and may include withholding payment (whole or part) of the grant.
- An approval under the NeighbourWood Scheme confirms only that the proposed project detailed in the application complies with the silvicultural and environmental requirements of the scheme and that the approval provides permission to undertake approved works (including planting) on all or part of the area specified, as long as those works do not lead to a material change in the project for which the approval was granted, and meet scheme requirements.
- The issuing of approval under the NeighbourWood Scheme does not guarantee that the proposed works (as amended by any conditions applied by the Department) will be successful. Responsibility for the success of the works (including establishment) rests solely with the Applicant, and the Department will not accept any liability if all or part of the works fail (e.g. if areas planted under NBR ESTABLISHMENT fail to establish). Nor can the Registered Forester and the Applicant rely upon inspection by the Department to ensure that the standards required of him or her are achieved. Failure to undertake works to the required standard may give rise to recovery by the Department of the grant paid to the Applicant, which will include interest payable at the appropriate rate. The Department accepts no liability for costs incurred by an Applicant at this stage or at all.
- Non-payment of a Registered Forester or Forestry Company for services provided will be a matter for resolution between the Applicant and the Registered Forester or Forestry Company, and the Minister shall bear no liability.
- The NeighbourWood Scheme is a cost-based scheme.

- No work shall be undertaken prior to the receipt of a Letter of Approval from the Department.
- The Minister reserves the right to alter the grant rate at any time.
- The terms and conditions of the NeighbourWood Scheme, as set out in this document (which may be revised from time-to-time by the Minister), any circulars amending the scheme requirements, all application forms (including the Form 1), Letters of Approval and (where appropriate) remedial works notifications, form the terms and conditions of any contact arising under the scheme. The contract will be identified by a unique Contract Number, which is assigned to it by the Department when the NeighbourWood Scheme Form 1 is received.

Contract period

The contract period starts on the completion date of all works. The contract term under all elements of the NeighbourWood Scheme is 6 years. Where circumstances exist that may require an extension of the contract term (for example, outstanding remedial works), the expiry date of a contract may be extended at the discretion of the Minister. The contract can also be terminated where remedial works are not undertaken to the satisfaction of the Department within the time frame specified.

Where access to privately-owned developments is closed for a period greater than 70 days within the 6 year contract period, all payments may be recovered.

Following an inspection, the Department may decide to terminate the contract for reasons to be specified in the contract termination letter. In these cases, a debt will be raised to recover any payment made. The Department will give 3 weeks prior notice of contract termination.

Remedial works

Where a notification (i.e. a Remedial Works Letter) is issued to the Applicant specifying remedial works required to bring his / her NeighbourWood Scheme site up to standard, the date specified in that letter by which the works must be completed, is binding on the Applicant. In exceptional circumstances, the Minister may grant an extension to that date. Requests for such extensions must be submitted in writing by the Applicant and Registered Forester at least 5 days before the expiry of the original deadline for completion.

Grants will be paid only when the entire NeighbourWood Scheme site is up to the required standard. If part of the NeighbourWood Scheme fails inspection, payment will be withheld on the entire area and across all elements being applied under (NBR Establishment, NBR Enhancement and NBR Facilities), until the specified remedial works are carried out to the required standard.

Failure to complete the specified works to the satisfaction of the Forest Service within the timeframe specified (or subsequently agreed) will result in the termination of the NeighbourWood Scheme contract and the recovery of all payments made.

Where the Forest Service decides that it is not possible to bring the NeighbourWood Scheme site – or part thereof – up to the required standard, no grant payment will be made for that area.

Failure to abide by the terms and conditions of the scheme

Where, for the purposes of obtaining payment under this Scheme, the Applicant or a person acting on his / her behalf, knowingly makes a false or misleading statement or declaration or withholds essential information, his / her participation in the scheme may be terminated and all or part of the grant aid paid shall be reimbursed.

Where an Applicant or a person acting on his / her behalf, fails to abide by the terms and conditions of the scheme, or where there is any material change in the circumstances of the Applicant which would be in conflict with the spirit of the scheme, his / her participation in the scheme may be terminated and all or part of the aid paid shall be reimbursed.

The obtaining of aid under the scheme by fraudulent means by the Applicant or a person acting on his / her behalf, or others acting alone or together, may render such persons liable to prosecution.

Reviews

An Applicant, his / her contractor or his / her agent may seek a review of a decision of the Minister regarding a NeighbourWood Scheme Form 1 application, an application for grant payment, or termination of contract.

A challenge to the substantive or procedural legality of decisions, acts or omissions subject to the public participation provisions of Council Directive 85/337/EC (EIA Directive), may be made by way of judicial review under Order 84 of the Rules of the Superior Courts.

Review of procedures and grant aid

The Minister reserves the right to alter the procedures and conditions to be followed in the operation of this scheme. Registered Foresters and Registered Forestry Companies shall receive reasonable notice in writing of such changes, prior to them taking effect. The Minister also reserves the right to review and vary, where the occasion so demands, the amount of financial aid wherever specified in the scheme.

Information and data protection

The Department reserves the right to make information regarding the NeighbourWood Scheme available to the public, subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003.

Information supplied to the Department may be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003. If an Applicant considers that any information supplied to the Department is either confidential or commercially sensitive, the Applicant should identify such information when submitting an application, and specify the reasons for its sensitivity. The Department will consult with the Applicant about this information before making any decision in relation to any request received under the Freedom of Information Acts.

State aid requirements

The incentive effect

Small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) (as defined in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) no. 651/2014) must indicate on the NeighbourWood Scheme application form that "*The work described herein, would not have been undertaken if it was not for the financial support provided under State Aid rules. Without this aid, there would be no change to current activities.*" For large companies, documentary evidence must be submitted in relation to the counterfactual (what would happen without the aid) for each of the measures proposed. This involves a credibility check of the counterfactual to establish that the company would not carry out the proposed work in the absence of aid. A counterfactual is credible if it is genuine and relates to the decision-making factors prevalent at the time of the decision by the beneficiary regarding the activity.

Large companies must submit an internal company document (separate to the application form) showing that the company has analysed the viability of the project – with and without aid – and showing the incentive effect. The document must clearly state what would have happened without the support available under the NeighbourWood Scheme. That means that the documentation (internal report) produced by the company must establish that the aid will cause at least one of the following:

- a material increase in the size of the project, or
- a material increase in the scope of the project, or
- a material increase in the total amount spent on the project.

The Forest Service will require that the company document shows a credible analysis and demonstration of the incentive effect. The document should contain an analysis which answers the following questions:

- Would the project proceed without State Aid assistance?
- Would the level of project expenditure be less without State Aid support? If so, indicate by how much?

This information should indicate changes in the project size, scope and total spend. Where required, this incentive effect document should be submitted with the NeighbourWood Scheme Form 1. As part of its evaluation of the application, the Forest Service will assess whether or not the incentive document meets the requirements set out above and is fully compliant with the European Union Guidelines for State Aid in the Agriculture and Forestry Sector and in Rural Areas, 2014–2020.

Proportionality of aid

Large companies must provide documentary evidence that the aid is proportionate. This can be achieved by submitting an Internal Rate of Return (IRR) and Net Present Value (NPV) analysis of the investment with grant aid and without grant aid with the Form 1. Only applications which are deemed proportionate will be grant aided by the Forest Service.

Transparency

The Department shall publish on its website at a national level the following information on the State Aid schemes, including the NeighbourWood Scheme:

- the full text of the notified aid scheme and its implementing provisions,
- the granting authority,
- the names of the individual beneficiaries, the form (in particular, the aid instrument) and amount of aid granted to each beneficiary,
- the date of granting,
- the type of undertaking (SME / large enterprise),
- the region (at NUTS Level II) (*) in which the beneficiary is located and the principal economic sector in which the beneficiary has its activities, at NACE (**) group level. This requirement only applies to individual aid awards greater than €60,000 for beneficiaries active in primary agriculture production, and €500,000 for others.

The beneficiaries table for the previous calendar year will appear on the Department website and will be replaced annually with the updated table. This will be done before March of that year.

A large company is defined as one with: a headcount of more than 250 people; a turnover greater than €50 million; or a balance sheet greater than €43 million (also see Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) no. 651/2014). If a company is part of a group, the employee, turnover, annual balance sheet and ownership limits apply to the group. It is up to the Applicant to properly declare themselves as a large company.

(* NUTS is short for 'Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics' and is a geographic classification developed by the EU. NUTS level II relates to "basic regions for the application of regional policies", and in Ireland's case, refers to the following regions: IE01 Border, Midland and Western; and IE02 Southern and Eastern.)

(** NACE is the statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community. It is an internationally agreed standard that facilitates the comparison of economic statistics between different countries and organisations. In the case of the NeighbourWood Scheme, it describes the activity of the Applicant in terms of his / her role in the economy, in other words, what economic activity s/he engaged in?)

Appendix B
NeighbourWood Plan

Overview

As set out in Section 3, the application process under the NeighbourWood Scheme involves the completion and submission of a NeighbourWood Plan. As well as addressing key aspects required in order to facilitate the Forest Service in its evaluation of the application, the NeighbourWood Plan will also serve as a basis for project partners to set out how the project will evolve overtime.

In order to ensure that key aspects are addressed, the NeighbourWood Plan must adhere to the following template, addressing each part in turn. An electronic version of this template is available for download at www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestservice

The NeighbourWood Plan must be developed by the Applicant and a Forest Service Registered Forester, and with input from the various project partners.

Maps are required to illustrate particular information within the NeighbourWood Plan. These maps, to be incorporated into the plan itself, must adhere to the following conventions:

- Maps must be appropriately scaled for clarity, and must be appropriately titled and cross-referenced with relevant text elsewhere within the plan. Aerial photos can be useful in this regard but must be eligible.
- Each map should accurately represent the information being illustrated, and be legible.
- In all maps, the perimeter of the overall NeighbourWood Scheme site should be outlined in red.
- Features and attributes must be clearly indicated using symbols, colours, letters, text-and-arrows, etc. and a concise legend. Linear features (e.g. existing footpaths, streams, hedgerows) should be indicated using colour-coding, and individual features (e.g. view points, proposed seating) by letters or symbols.
- Applicants should be aware of the value of aerial photographs for mapping, particularly in locating existing site features, habitats, boundaries and reference points. The NeighbourWood Plan can be accompanied by additional material such as site photos, aerial photos, supporting literature, letters of support and local newspaper articles.

The NeighbourWood Plan must be submitted in a photocopy-friendly A4 format, avoiding permanent binding.

NeighbourWood Plan

TEMPLATE DOCUMENT: ***INSERT SPACES, AS NECESSARY***

Part A: Project Overview

1. Give the site location and the Applicant's name, as stated in the accompanying NeighbourWood Scheme Form 1.
2. Indicate the NeighbourWood Scheme element(s) being applied for (tick as relevant).

   NBR ESTABLISHMENT ☐

   NBR ENHANCEMENT ☐

   NBR FACILITIES ☐
3. Detail any related application under the Native Woodland Scheme.
4. Give an overview of the proposed NeighbourWood project, including its overall aims, linkages with other projects / initiatives / amenities, incorporation into local plans, etc.
5. Is this NeighbourWood Scheme application (for a maximum of 12 ha in area) part of a wider woodland or outdoor amenity initiative / programme. If so, describe.
6. List the specific partners involved in the project (e.g. local authority, local resident groups, environmental NGOs, local schools, sporting bodies). Describe the role of each, both to date and in the future. Provide contact details for each.
7. Describe the level of contact and dialogue locally with other statutory bodies, such as the National Parks & Wildlife Service and Inland Fisheries Ireland. While the Forest Service will refer to such bodies as it deems necessary, local contact and dialogue in advance of submission will ensure a level of awareness regarding the project.
8. Who will be the likely users of the woodland? Describe the likely level of use.
9. Describe measures undertaken to involve local people (e.g. existing site users, adjoining residents, local families, local schools) in the development of the project to date.
10. Describe measures to involve local people in the future, as the project develops.
11. Who will be responsible for the long-term maintenance and development of the project, and what measures are being put in place to underpin this?

Part B: Site Details

1. Describe the location of the site, particularly in relation to nearby centres of population.
2. What is the area, in hectares, of the overall site?
3. What is the ownership status of the site? (Please note, if privately owned, the Applicant must provide a declaration that the amenity will be maintained and access provided for a period of 6 years after the completion date of all works.)
4. What is the overall site currently being used for?
5. Give a general overview of the existing features on the site, illustrating these on a NeighbourWood Plan Map. Existing features include:
   - existing walking routes (forest roads, footpaths, unofficial tracks)
   - other existing recreational facilities (car parking, picnic sites, seating, etc.)
   - existing habitats (*)
   - archaeological features, earthworks, old stonewalls, etc. (Note that full adherence to the Forest Service *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation* (if NBR Establishment) and the *Forestry & Archaeological Guidelines* and to any special conditions attached to the Letter of Approval, is required in relation to archaeological features on and adjoining the site.)
   - other historical or cultural features
   - prominent viewpoints.

   (* Existing habitats should be mapped using the 2nd level classification codes listed in pages 14-15 of the Heritage Council's *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000; available at www.heritagecouncil.ie). E.g. **GA2** Amenity grassland (improved); **BL1** Stone walls and other stonework; **WD2** Mixed broadleaved/conifer woodland; **FW2** Depositing/lowland rivers.)
6. Describe any threats that, unless addressed, may have a negative impact on project development (e.g. vandalism, horse trespass, invasive species, over-mature canopy, fire, persistent dumping). Note that these factors will have to be addressed in subsequent sections of the plan.

Part C: Project Objectives

1. What is the medium to long term vision for the site over the next 20 years?
2. What are the short-term objectives to be achieved before the application for grant payment. Note that grant payment will depend on these objectives being met. Specific details are required, for example:

   "To clear laurel from 3.0 ha concentrated in the northwest of the site."

   "To develop a short way-marked looped walking trail 750 m long, together with a welcoming sign at two entrance points and seating at six vantage points on the site."

   "To establish 4.0 ha of new amenity woodland, comprising oak, ash, rowan and silver birch."

Part D: Neighbourwood ESTABLISHMENT (complete if necessary)

1. How much of the overall site, in hectares, is being submitted under NBR Establishment? Note that this area must correspond with the area for this element submitted on the Form 1 and illustrated on the Certified Species Map.
2. Describe and cost proposed operations to be completed before the submission for grant payment. *Note that specific details are required, e.g. species to be planted, planting ratios, protective measures.*
3. Using a map, illustrate within the NBR Establishment area the actual 'footprint' of the proposed planting and the proposed open spaces. (Up to 30% of the NBR Establishment area is allowed as integrated open space.) Also illustrate the position of protective fencing (if used) and other relevant operations.
4. Using a yearly schedule, describe the operations to be completed under this element within the 6 year contract period of the overall NeighbourWood Scheme project.
5. In general terms, describe operations envisaged up to year 20 within the NBR Establishment area.

Part E. NeighbourWood ENHANCEMENT (complete if necessary)

1. How much of the overall site, in hectares, is being submitted under NBR ENHANCEMENT? Note that this area must correspond with the area for this element submitted on the Form 1 and illustrated on the Certified Species Map.
2. Describe and cost proposed operations to be completed before the submission for grant payment (i.e. Form 2). *Note that specific details are required, e.g. species for removal, species to be planted, planting ratios, protective measures.*
3. Using a map, illustrate (where practical) within the NBR ENHANCEMENT area where these operations will take place, e.g. areas to be cleared of rhododendron, the position and extent of planting coupes, the positioning of protective fencing.
4. Using a yearly schedule, describe the operations to be completed under this element within the 6 year contract period of the overall NeighbourWood Scheme project.
5. In general terms, describe operations envisaged up to year 20 within the NBR ENHANCEMENT area.

Part F: NeighbourWood FACILITIES (complete if necessary)

1. How much of the site, in hectares, is being submitted for funding under NBR FACILITIES? Note that this area must correspond with the area for this element submitted on the Form 1 and illustrated on the Certified Species Map.
2. Describe and cost the proposed facilities to be installed / upgraded before the submission for grant payment (i.e. Form 2). Include clear specification for each type (including diagrams, plans and photos), the number of units and the unit cost (including materials and installation).
3. Using a map, illustrate within the NBR FACILITIES area the proposed position of each facility (e.g. footpaths, seats, picnic tables, signs, car parking).
4. Using a yearly schedule, describe the ongoing maintenance and replacement envisaged regarding these facilities within the 6 year contract period of the overall NeighbourWood Scheme project.

Part G: NeighbourWood Scheme Criteria

As set out in the NeighbourWood Scheme document, the evaluation of applications involves scoring based on set criteria that best capture the aims and objectives of the scheme. Seven criteria apply, each with an equal weighting of 10 points. Only those applications that achieve a minimum of 45 points out of a maximum score of 70 will be eligible for approval, subject to suitability and the availability of funds.

In this section of the NeighbourWood Plan, Applicants are required to demonstrate how the application meets these criteria. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to describe any relevant details that relate to each criterion and to provide any relevant supporting documentation (e.g. visitor surveys, letters of support, minutes of meetings with community groups). Otherwise, points cannot be awarded

Criterion 1: The extent to which the site is already used – or has the potential to be used – by the local community on a 'free-to-enter' basis, for non-specialised outdoor / woodland recreation (e.g. walking, jogging, family picnics).

Indicators include the level of existing use, the active presence of a local community group seeking recreational development, the proximity to an population centre, existing attributes of the site lending itself to recreational development (e.g. attractive mixed woodland, features, views), the level of immediate (onsite or immediately adjacent) access to other wider walking routes or cycle ways, and / or with an existing attraction onsite which itself draws significant visitor numbers.

Criterion 2: Extent and level of partnership underpinning the application, relating to the local authority (or other public body), the local community, specific user groups (including people with particular needs), particular interest groups (e.g. local historical societies, birdwatchers), local schools, local businesses, local development enterprises, etc.

Criterion 3: The level of focus on the provision of a high quality and varied experience for users of all ages and abilities, through the installation of appropriate facilities.

Indicators include the appropriate layout and design of facilities, including pathways, signage, information boards, the level of balance reached between the carrying capacity of the woodland and the layout and density of pathways, the layout of pathways to provide looped walks and to lead visitors to key woodland features.

Criterion 4: The level of focus on the provision of environmental education and outdoor interpretation of the woodland habitat, and habitats in general, and also the wider heritage associated with Ireland's woodlands and forests - natural, historical and cultural.

Indicators will include the nature of facilities being proposed (e.g. nature trail, specialised signage), existing or proposed linkage with local schools, the diversity of the woodland and its suitability for this use, a parallel application under the Forest Service Native Woodland Scheme.

Criterion 5: The level of focus on identifying potential issues regarding (e.g.) security, dumping, vandalism, fire, and on formulating proposed integrated and sustainable solutions to tackle these.

Criterion 6: The level of integration into the local infrastructure. Indicators include inclusion with local development plans and tourist leaflets, road signage, good quality approach roads and / or footpaths, integration into local transport.

Criterion 7: The long-term future sustainability of the project, for example, integration into local authority (or other public body) budgets, evidence of linkage into long-term plans (County Council Development Plan, Biodiversity Plan, ‘Green’ Plan, Tourism Plan, Recreational Strategy).

Part H: Declaration

We, the undersigned, declare that we have jointly prepared this NeighbourWood Plan as part of the application for this site under the Forest Service NeighbourWood Scheme, following a detailed site assessment and consultation with project partners, and in accordance with the terms and condition of the scheme, and that all information is accurate and correct to the best of our knowledge.

Applicant

Signature _____ Date _____

Registered Forester

Signature _____ Date _____